

Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

February, 2010

Welcome

February is Dental Month, so this month's newsletter is all about teeth! We will discuss what you can do at home to keep your pet's teeth and gums healthy, as well as why this is so important and the consequences of not practicing good oral care at home. As always, if you have any questions, contact us via email, phone, or just stop by.

Dental Health Awareness Month: What Should I Do At Home?

Keeping your pet's mouth in good condition is not as hard as many people believe. Read on to learn different tools to use at home.

- Use a dry kibble diet that is formulated to help keep your pet's teeth clean. Hills Prescription Diet D/D and Royal Canin Prescription Diet Dental DS or Dental DD are some examples. Prescription diets tend to work better than over-the-counter formulas.

- Give treats that promote healthy teeth and gums. Carrots and apple slices are good choices, but as with all treats don't feed too many! Although rawhides and bones can help reduce tartar on the teeth, there are risks involved with giving these as treats. We do not recommend feeding rawhide pieces, pig ears, cow hooves, or cooked bones. If you feel you must give rawhides, make sure to use the compressed rawhides made only from American beef rather than braided or straight ones.



- Give your pet toys to chew on that promote clean teeth and healthy gums. Kong makes several "dental toys" with raised nubs to massage the gums and knock bits of tartar off the teeth. You can also apply pet tooth paste to them. Then when they chew they can help brush their own teeth!



- Brush your pet's teeth regularly!

This is the easiest and most effective way to keep your pet's mouth clean.

Pets with dirty mouths tend to have more chronic disease, including an infection of the heart valves that can cause an irreparable heart murmur. Start when they're young, and your pet may live up to two years longer!

- Use a mouthwash specially formulated for pets. These mouthwashes, or rinses, are available in both prescription and over-the-counter formulas. Look for one that is "enzymatic." This means that the enzymes in the solution will adhere to the plaque on your pet's teeth and continue fighting the germs found there even after your pet swallows or spits out the main portion of the rinse. Avoid those with alcohol listed as an ingredient.



- Use a water additive. These are not as effective as other methods to keep your pet's teeth clean but they will help to some degree, and they are safe for ingestion.

Dental Health Awareness Month: Why is Dental Health so Important?

The teeth and gums provide a direct pipeline for bacteria to enter the bloodstream. It's not just that pets can lose teeth and have bad breath, but the bacteria in their mouths can infect *every* organ in the body. Although infections are often curable in early stages, they can cause chronic illness, pain and even death if ignored. Look for these symptoms to tell if your pet needs further dental care.

- Bad breath is often the first noticeable sign of dental disease. It is a common complaint we

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hear from clients. Bad breath is caused in part by bacteria build-up on the teeth. These bacteria live in the tartar that forms on your pet's teeth and contribute to many illnesses as well as "dog breath." They are the same species of bacteria found in decaying meat! If you brush your pet's teeth at least once a day and feed a high-quality diet, your pet will have less bacteria in his mouth and will not have a bad odor.

- Tartar build-up is another symptom that your pet needs more oral care. The saliva in a dog's mouth has a higher pH than that of a human, which allows these plaque formations of tartar to grow easier. These sheets of mineral deposits offer a great place for bacteria to live. Untreated, tartar may cover the entire tooth

and cause infections of the gums and ligaments attaching the teeth to the jawbone.

Severe tartar overgrowth may even introduce infection to the blood stream, which can affect the heart permanently.



- Gingivitis is another disease of the mouth that we see in patients on an everyday basis. Bacteria infecting the gum tissue surrounding the teeth cause this disease. We see this condition in patients with tartar build up most often, but it can also occur without this build up.

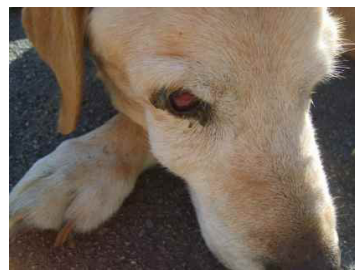


Gingivitis begins as inflammation and redness of the gums, but if it is not treated this disease can progress to cause infection, lesions

on the teeth, and attachment loss. Even the bone itself can be affected!

- Swelling to the muzzle or under the eye area can indicate an abscess has formed. An abscess is a pocket of infection that is walled off within one area of the body. If that pocket ruptures, the infection can spread throughout the entire body. In the wild, this is one of the most

common causes of death. If you notice your pet's muzzle or face looks uneven, or there is a marked area of swelling, have him examined as soon as possible.



- Not wanting to eat, dropping food while eating and drooling more than usual may be symptoms of dental disease also. These are often the outward symptoms seen by pet owners that indicate there is something wrong in the mouth. Unfortunately, by the time a pet's mouth causes him this much discomfort, the underlying problem has been worsening for some time.

Dental disease is a serious issue that pet owners often overlook. By watching your pet carefully, getting scheduled veterinary care and following a simple home-care routine you can help keep your pet's teeth and body healthy. Dental hygiene is an important part of everyday pet care.

February Special: Any dental cleaning* done in February will receive a free mini-panel on the day of the procedure to evaluate for kidney, liver, and anemia issues. A \$40 value. Mention this special when you schedule your pet's dental cleaning to receive this great offer.

*Elderly or compromised pets will require more extensive bloodwork that requires us to send the sample to a lab at least two days prior to procedure. Clients will receive \$40 off the cost of this bloodwork.

Thanks for your patronage. Next month, we'll feature reasons to spay and neuter your pet, as well as how to keep your pet safe and healthy in early spring. If you would like to opt out of receiving the Elburn Animal Hospital newsletter, please contact us at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net.